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SUBJECT: DRL A/S LOWENKRON CONSULTS WITH HOLY SEE ON RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM ISSUES

REF: EMBASSY VATICAN (MARTIN) - EUR/WE EMAIL DEC 21

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher J. Sandrolini, DCM, AMEMB VATICAN,
STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: DRL A/S Lowenkron's December 21 meeting with
deputy FM Parolin focused largely on religious freedom matters
in Vietnam, Lebanon, Turkey, Venezuela, and Cuba. Parolin
explained the Holy See's strategy for increasing religious
freedom in problem countries and provided details of the
progress and challenges the Catholic Church faces in these
countries. While fairly upbeat about overall progress, Parolin
provided a frank assessment of the Church's greatest challenges
in increasing religious freedoms. End Summary

Holy See's Religious Freedom Strategy

¶2. (C) DRL A/S Barry Lowenkron, accompanied by the Deputy Chief
of Mission and notetaker met December 21 with Monsignor Pietro
Parolin, the Holy See's Undersecretary for Relations with States
(Deputy FM equivalent) to discuss religious-freedom issues.
Parolin said the Holy See promotes religious freedom by
demonstrating to reluctant governments the advantages of a
liberal religious-freedom environment. Many governments are
presently grappling with the adverse consequences flowing from a
morally bankrupt younger generation, he said, and the Holy See
envisioned a vital role for the Catholic Church by instilling
spiritual and moral values in these nation's citizens -- "we
emphasize that the Church does not wish to destabilize, but
rather we can serve to help stabilize and improve conditions
within a given country".

Vietnam: Religious Freedom Improvements but More Progress Needed

¶3. (C) Parolin said the Holy See seeks expanded diplomatic
interaction with Vietnam, having observed an improved attitude
toward religious freedom by the Government of Vietnam. He
cautioned that the GOV's ideology is still communist and they
continue to seek control over the Church and the free exercise
of religion. He added that the Vietnamese are far more liberal
than before, and the Holy See believes there are fair prospects
for continued improvement.

¶4. (C) Parolin offered examples of Vietnam's more liberal
attitude toward religious freedom, pointing to the release of

prisoners of conscience and the fact that there are no Catholics in jail at the present. The GOV also continues to accept the Holy See's candidates for bishop. "We need a great deal of patience with the GOV," said Parolin, "as there is great promise there for continued improvement."

15. (C) He told Lowenkron that the Holy See was surprised but pleased to see Vietnam's removal from the list of countries of particular concern in the most recent Human Rights report. Lowenkron explained that Vietnam had shown some positive movement which led to the de-listing, but emphasized that it is an annual review process and if Vietnam could be re-listed if it backslides.

16. (C) According to some sources, said Parolin, Vietnam had recently told PRC officials that things are not going well in Vietnam with the Catholic Church. "We were disappointed and surprised by this information" he said, noting that the GOV had not made any such points to the Holy See. Parolin said the Holy See plans a visit to Vietnam in March 2007 and will use that trip to push for increased religious freedom, especially in the area of religious education which is presently barred by the GOV.

Lebanon: A Thorny Issue with No Solution in Sight

17. (C) Parolin said Lebanon remains a very thorny issue with no visible solution in the near term. Christian unity is key to Lebanon's long-term prospects for survival; Lebanon's religious diversity demonstrates to the rest of the Middle East why the preservation of the Christian communities throughout the region is so important.

18. (C) Asked about prospects of a Vatican envoy to Lebanon, Parolin said the Holy See was very much engaged on the issue, but would hold off sending a special envoy to Lebanon for the time being. The Holy See was ready and willing to undertake such a mission, but the "conditions had to be right." Asked

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what criteria the Holy See would use to make its decision, Parolin said there had to be "someone there available to listen and accept a suggestion." At present, he continued, there is "no way anyone will listen now" in Lebanon. (Ref e-mail)

Turkey: Pope's Trip Very Successful - Work Remains

19. (C) Parolin noted the Vatican's pleasure at the success of the Pope's recent trip to Turkey. The Pope's first priority was initially to make progress on reintegrating the Roman Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church, said Parolin, but after Regensburg the priority changed to improving inter-religious dialogue. In the end, the trip "changed the atmosphere of relations" between the Catholic and Islamic faiths.

110. (C) Nevertheless there remain challenges for the Catholic Church in Turkey. Parolin pointed to the recent assassination of a priest, and the refusal of the President of Turkey to sign the new Foundations Law, as examples. Regarding the Foundations Law (which would protect the property rights of the Church), Parolin said the Holy See has no idea of law's future prospects and requested USG assistance in pushing for the establishment of a bilateral commission to develop a recommendation for GOT consideration.

Venezuela: Curtailment of Religious Education Top Concern

111. (C) The Holy See is very concerned with the Government of Venezuela's curtailment of the Catholic Church's freedom to provide education. Parolin conceded the difficulty of the issue, noting that the Holy See does not seek a public

confrontation with President Chavez, but hopes this matter can be resolved diplomatically. As previously reported, the Pope had provided President Chavez a list of concerns when he visited Vatican late last year, including the education issue.

Cuba: "Something is Developing"

¶12. (C) Parolin agreed that a transition was coming in Cuba, emphasizing that "nothing can remain the same". He hoped that new legislation would help matters.

¶13. (C) This cable was cleared by DRL A/S Lowenkron.
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